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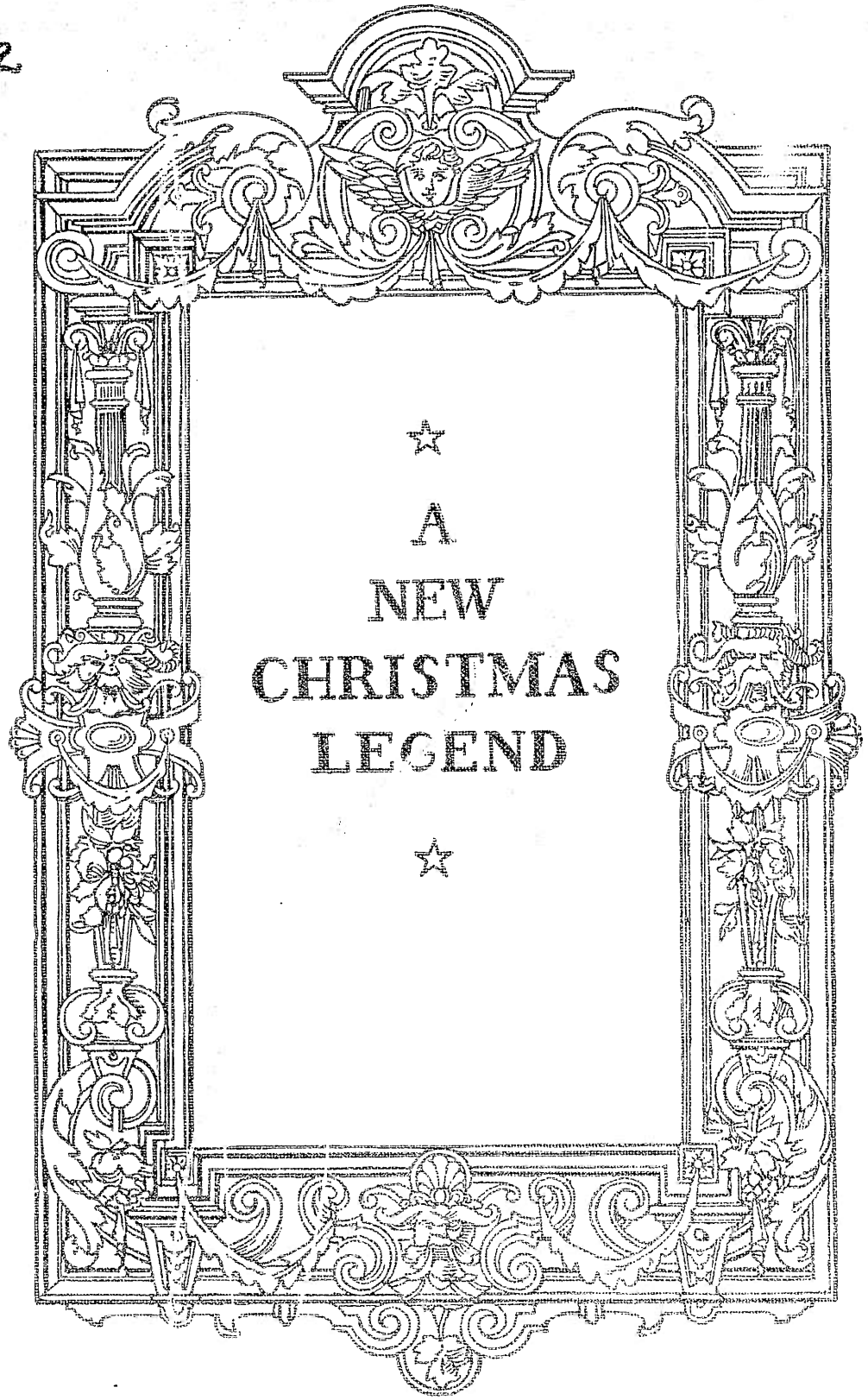

A NEW CHRISTMAS LEGEND

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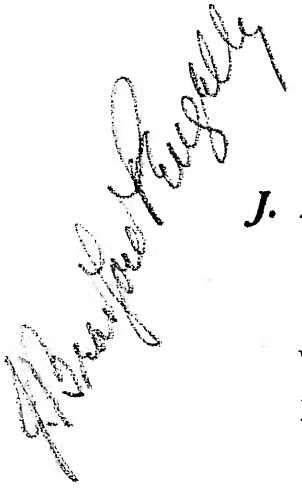
A NEW CHRISTMAS LEGEND

BY

J. BRADFORD PENGELLY



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By

J. BRADFORD PENGELLY

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FIRST EDITION

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHARACTERS

Cyrus.....A Prince of Persia
Benjamin.....An Artisan of Damascus
Samuel.....A Merchant of Ephesus
Aristos.....A Teacher of Athens

SETTING

Babylonia
Palestine
Damascus
Ephesus
Athens

TIME

4 B. C. to 25 A. D.

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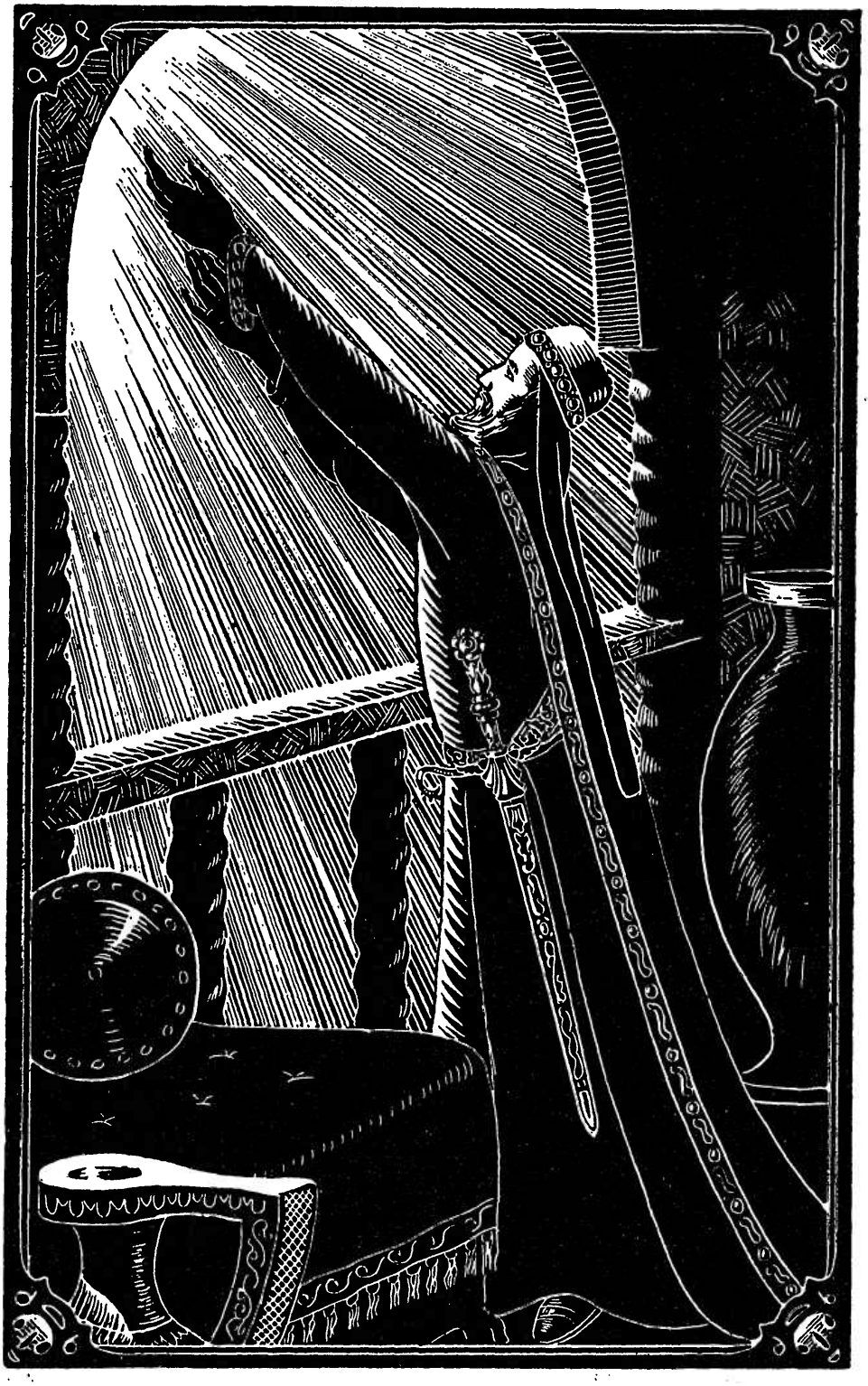


I.

THE ETERNAL QUEST OF THE SPIRIT

IN THE DAYS OF CAESAR

WHEN CAESAR AUGUSTUS ruled in Rome and his legions were all powerful, a child was born in one of the hilly towns on "The Bridge of the World." This child was destined to become a great king who would subdue the nations by his spiritual power.

For centuries many men had longed and watched for the advent of this child. Ancient books of lore were full of joyful songs about his coming and old histories were ever renewed by the prophecies of the birth of a mighty counsellor, a prince of peace, and a savior of men.

Now the time had come when the whole earth was atremor and the hearts of men aglow. Everyone and everything seemed to sense the immediateness of a mysterious and wonderful event. The thought pulsated everywhere that "The Day of the Lord" was at hand. The Magi scanned the skies with their trained and eager eyes. The lowly shepherds watching their flocks by night unconsciously turned their faces to the heavens with humble adoration. A divine expectancy welled up in the hearts of men. The time had come when the Eternal Spirit was going to become man and make his home on earth.

In the twenty-third year of the reign of Augustus, being the year 4 B.C., when peace had blessed the Roman world for many moons, the subject peoples of the Empire were ordered to their respective cities to be enrolled and

to be taxed. In the land of Palestine, "The Bridge of the World," where Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman had in turn marched to and fro with triumphant tread, the Jewish families pilgrimaged to their fathers' cities to be assessed.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

Lying nestled in the hills of Judea like a babe gathered in its mother's arms lies the little town of Bethlehem!

"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight."

This was the city of the great king David and thither went the families of the royal house to be registered and taxed by the Romans who ruled the land. Among the families who made this solemn and pathetic journey was the one of Joseph of Nazareth, a carpenter, and his wife Mary. When they arrived in Bethlehem the little town was so crowded that there was no room for them at any of the inns. Joseph and his wife, being poor, found their quarters in a stable.

Unknown to many and recognized by only a few, a bright star moved as did this holy family, and when the young Mary laid herself down to rest the star rested right above her and its brightness increased so that all who had waited and watched learned to know its story. Mary was soon to be delivered of her child, a boy, the Anointed One of God.

A few men in Palestine, Babylonia, Damascus, Ephesus, and in Athens, knew that the star was prophetic of the approaching birth of the Son of Man.

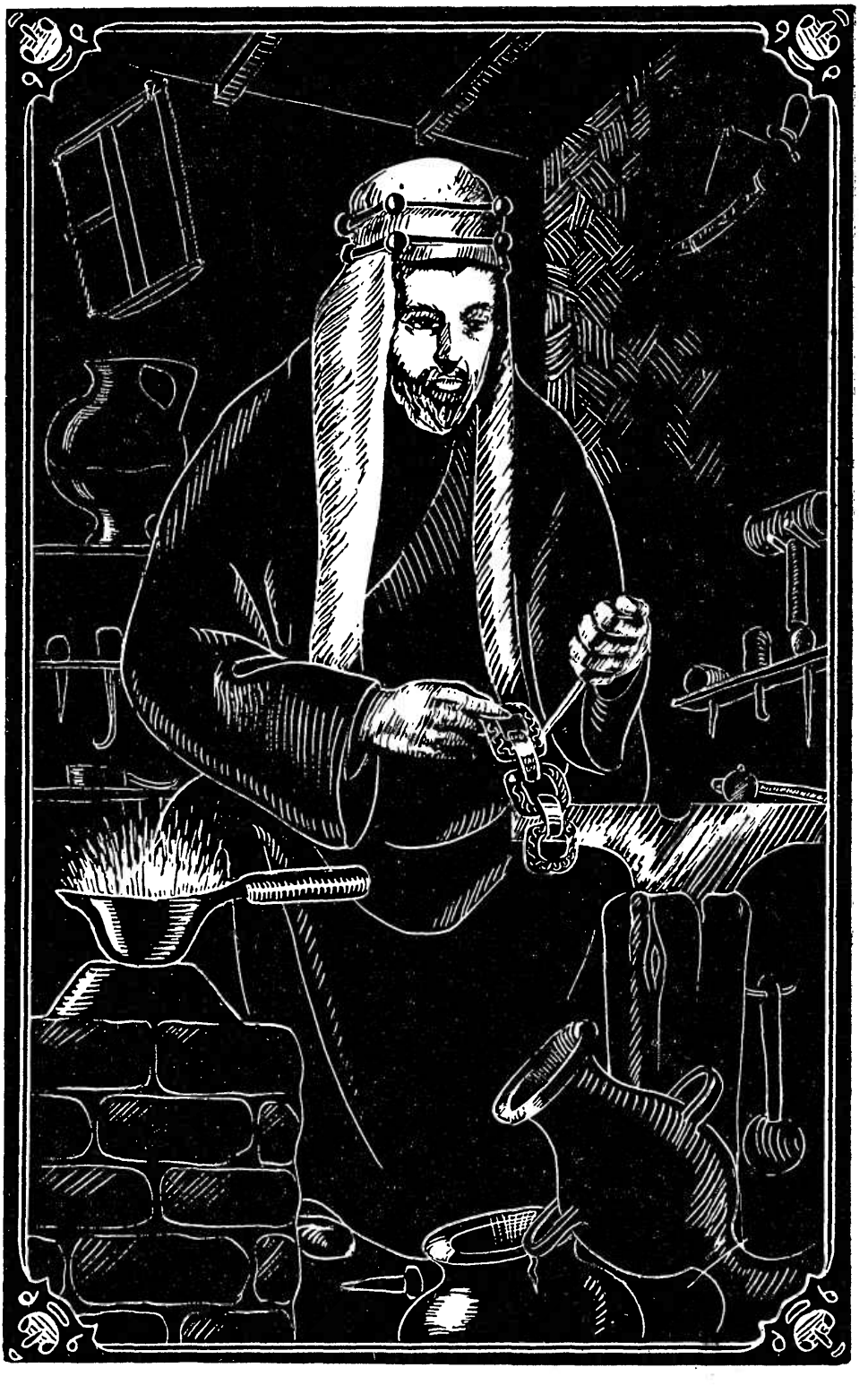
BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

In distant Babylonia there lived a Persian Prince who ruled over a large portion of that wonderful land nourished by the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris. His name was Cyrus. This thoughtful man was learned in the long history of his land and the many peoples who had ruled or been captives there. He had pondered some of the Jewish prophecies and legends and had kept in mind the character and sayings of Daniel, a Hebrew captive. The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of a prince who would rule in equity fired his imagination.

Often, as he engaged in the mystic rites of his religion and worshipped the great Ormuzd, his fancy followed the fires of the ritual, and he saw, "The Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

Late in the month of December as Cyrus sat one evening in the upper story of his palace looking toward the west he distinguished a new star. He was thrilled with joy, and rising quickly lifted his hands towards the star saying, "O Ormuzd! thou eternal prince of light, praise be thine, that mine eyes have seen the star of him who will drive Ahriman, the prince of darkness, from the hearts of men. O Ormuzd! grant that this star may shine every night to lead me until I have found the child."

For a few moments he gazed in rapture at the heavenly token and then folded his arms upon his breast and bowed his head in silent gratitude and meditation. Presently he raised his head and gazed steadfastly at this new light of heaven. His proud and erect bearing; his flowing purple robe with crimson borders; his gleaming,



black eyes; his strong, refined profile; and the spiritual gladness of his face, all enhanced by the soft setting of this clear and glorious night, made him appear the most princely of men. The whole scene was like an enchanted painting.

Cyrus watched the star quietly and adoringly until it sank from view, then he descended into one of the spacious rooms of his palace. He busied himself awhile attending to some of the many details of his state, for he was a ruler who loved his people and strove to do his best. When these matters had been arranged he called two of his most trusty servants and told them to prepare themselves and his three favorite Arabian steeds for a long journey towards the Great Sea in the west. The servants withdrew and Cyrus reclined on one of his divans to dream of the quest of the Promised Child.

THE DREAM OF A WORKING MAN

In the city of Damascus there lived an artisan by the name of Benjamin who was skilled in working gold, a goldsmith as we should say today. Benjamin was not a Jew, but a Samaritan. He was neither of a princely, nor of a priestly, nor of a wealthy family. For generations his family had been workingmen who were not ashamed of their calling, but proud of their exceptional skill. Benjamin belonged to the common people.

By inheritance, by regular work of a high order, and by the cultivation of quiet and happy habits, Benjamin had put aside from his earnings twelve talents of silver, which would equal about six thousand dollars of our money. This was enough to make him more or less independent and was considered a fine achievement, as Benjamin was not old, being only in his fiftieth year. He was alert and active; intelligent, generous, honest, and pious.

Although a Samaritan and an artisan, Benjamin was not lacking either in religious interests or in the love of learning. He was thoughtful and well read. In the evenings, on holidays and Sabbaths, Benjamin occupied his time in study. He was much taken with the writings of Isaiah who spoke of the coming of a prince who would reign with justice.

> "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.
>
> "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

He read and pondered other Hebrew prophets until his heart was filled with a yearning for the social salvation of mankind. He, too, looked for "The Day of the Lord" when a child would be born who would be the friend of the masses, and who would love and sympathize with those who labor because he himself would grow up to know toil.

Many a night found Benjamin sitting alone upon the top of the house which he himself owned. He knew little about the stars, but a small, still voice told him that some night, as he watched and prayed for the social salvation of man, a sign would appear in the skies.

And then, one evening as he walked to his home from a meeting of his fellow laborers, where problems relating to their common life had occupied their attention, a joyous restlessness surged in his heart. "This is the night!" he cried, as he quickened his pace. "This is the night that

I shall see the long looked for sign of heaven." Retiring to his favorite retreat on the roof of his house, he scanned the skies with confident expectency, "The Star of Bethlehem; The Promised Son will soon be born. I will go and carry him presents and swear my allegiance to him."

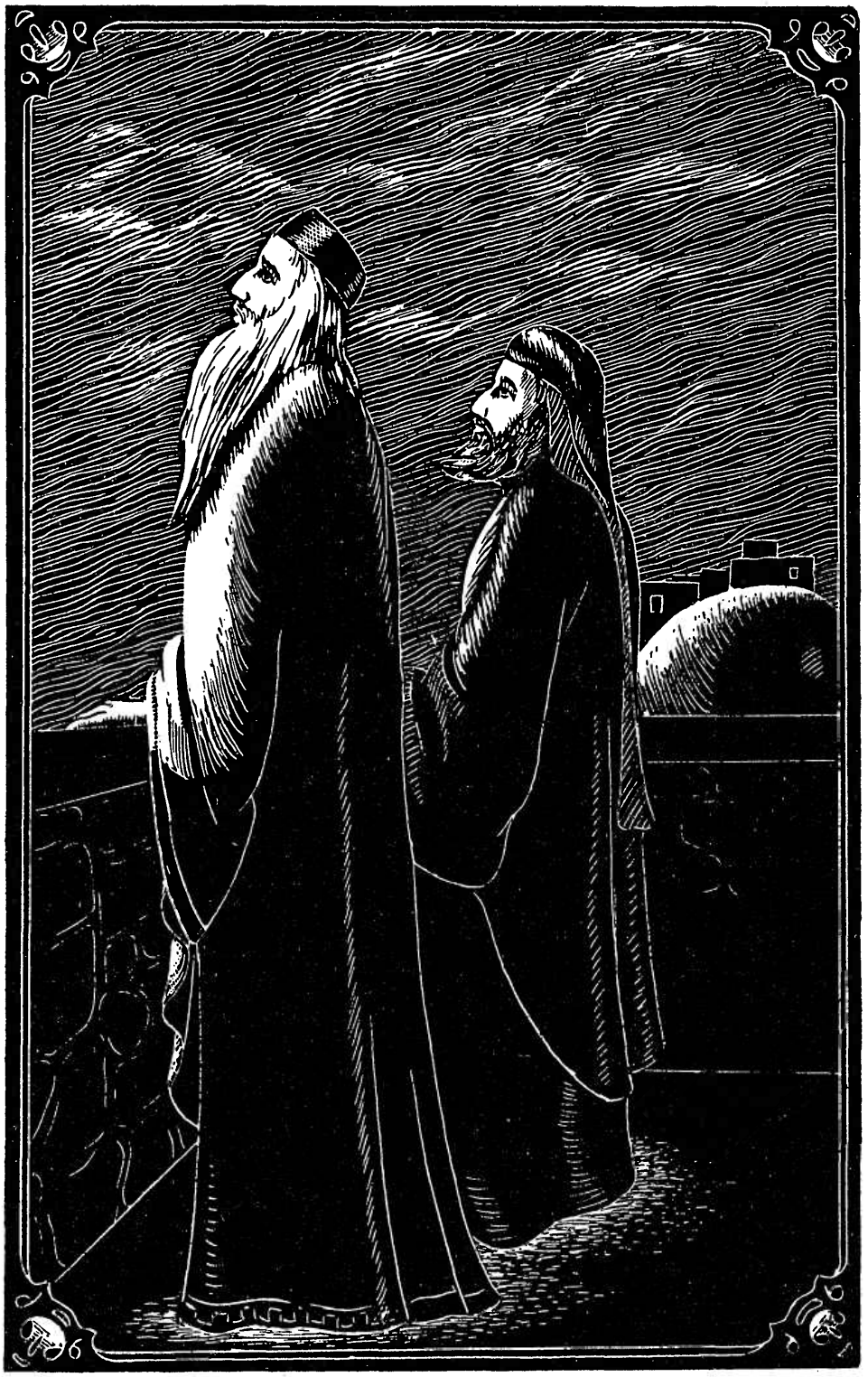
WATCHING STARRY SKIES

In the populous and rich city of Ephesus there lived a Jewish merchant who was renowned for his shrewdness and for the success of his factories and stores. His business was the making and marketing of tents. In all of the great centers of Asia Minor he had his houses and agents. He was well known as Samuel the Merchant Prince of Ephesus.

This man was a Jew of the Dispersion and a strict Pharisee. He was learned in the Mosaic law, very devout, faithful in the performance of religious duties and was earnestly waiting for "The Day of the Lord" when God would reveal his salvation in the Holy City and gather Israel under the leadership of the long promised Messiah.

Samuel was regular in attendance at the synagogue and talked much with the Rabbi who was a scholarly and spiritual man. The Rabbi pondered the revered books of his people. He felt that the time was at hand for the coming of the Anointed One. Accounts of the fervent preaching of a prophet named Simon along the shores of the river Jordan had reached him and caused him to study all prophecies anew.

One Sabbath as Hillel, the Rabbi, and Samuel the merchant, conversed after the reading and explanation of a passage from "The Prophets," Hillel said, "Son, I believe the birthday of the promised King and Redeemer is at hand. All signs seem to point to that event. Can we not watch for the star that our wise men have informed



us will appear to tell us of the advent of the Prince of Peace? Did not Isaiah say?

> 'Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel'."

Samuel's heart leapt for joy and he invited Hillel to join him in the evening to watch for the star. From the top of Samuel's house they looked away to the south. As they watched, a peaceful silence fell upon them, which was hardly broken when Hillel, whose keenly trained perceptions enabled him to recognize quickly the prophetic star, calmly broke the soft stillness saying humbly,— "Samuel, yonder is the heavenly sign."

Samuel made no reply other than a smile, for the joy of that hour was too sublime for words. The two men stood transfigured with ecstacy. Their spirits were aglow from the inner spiritual light which shone through their eyes, suffused their faces, and brightened their heads with happy halos.

What a scene! The Rabbi with his stately stature, his high brow, his large, thoughtful eyes, and his long white beard: the merchant with his quick eyes, his shrewd face, his short, dark beard, and his somewhat stooped form; blended into a painting silhouetted against the blue sky of this clear night that filled one with the mystery of that indefinable and ineffable quest of the human soul for God and His salvation which will complete the life of man. "Tomorrow I will start for Jerusalem where I shall find among the wise men the full meaning of this star. Master wilt thou go?" Hillel replied quietly and resignedly, "My work keeps me here. You go and I will stay at home and pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

Athens! Mother of the intellect, cradle of the arts, sciences, and philosophy.

Here, where once walked the mighty thinkers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, lived a man worthy of his intellectual heritage. His name was Aristos and he was a distinguished scholar, an honor to his spiritual mother, Athens. This man had read and pondered the great epics of his race. The later poets of his country he knew by heart. The histories of Herodotus fascinated him. He was also versed in the Vedas, the sacred books of India; in the Avestas, the sacred books of Zoroaster; in the "Book of the Dead," the great religious work of the Egyptians, and in the religious and moral writings of the Hebrews. In brief, he had studied all religions, philosophies, sciences, and systems of ethics.

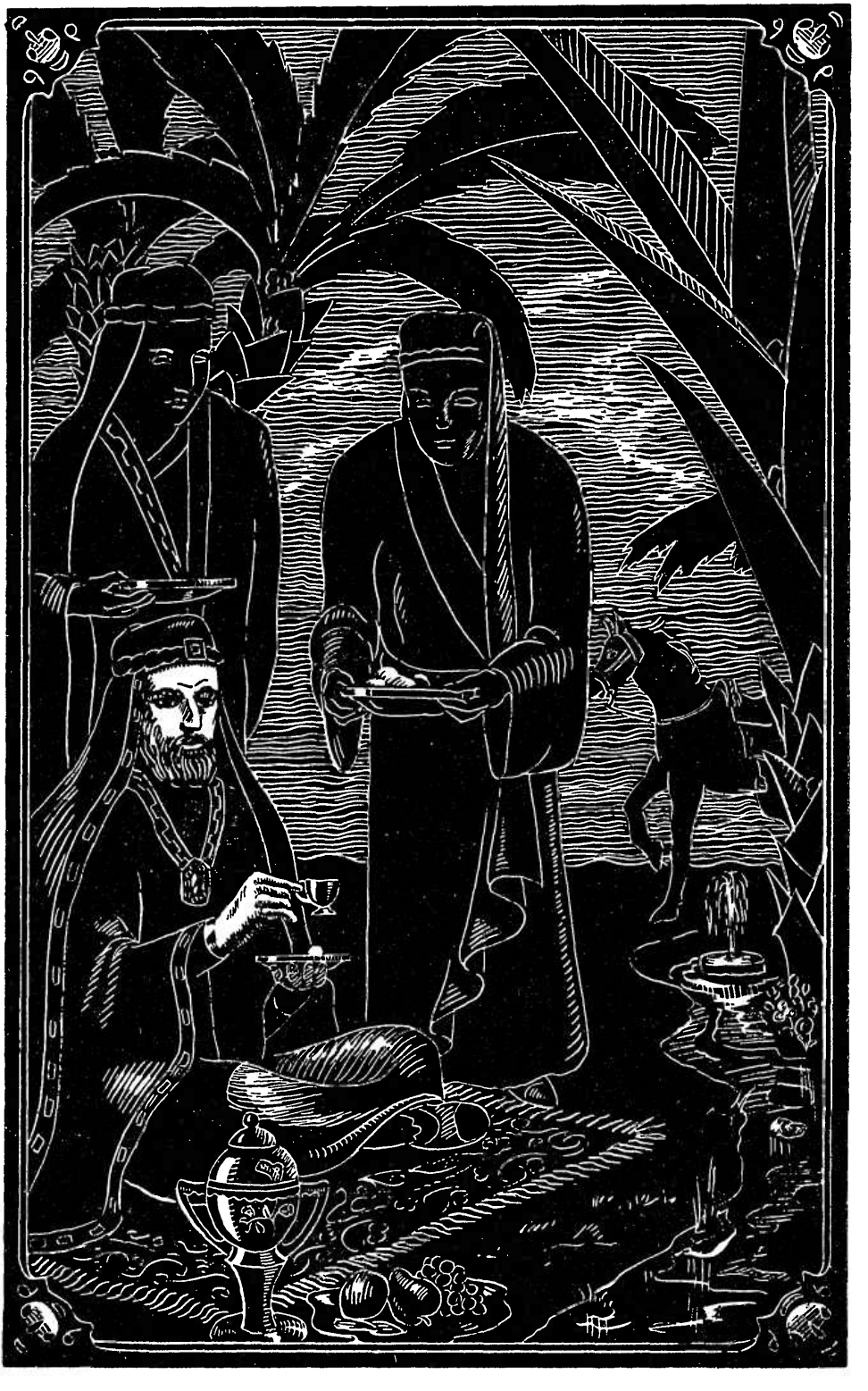
Aristos was probably fifty-five years old and his appearance was impressive in every bearing and expression. His eyes were large and luminous like the brighter stars; his forehead broad and high; his face had a few light lines that were evidences of concentrated thinking. His character was noble, and every gesture and look were refined and dignified. He walked, or stood, or talked with the fine poise of a man who has studied deeply the inner meaning of life. For such a man as he, all men have the greatest admiration.

One evening as Aristos stood musing near the southeastern corner of the Acropolis in Athens, he began to think of the remarkable age-old longings of the human heart, of its craving for salvation, immortality, and perfection. "Surely," he said to himself, "there is an answer, a rational answer, to these yearnings of the deepest being of man."

Then he recalled the stories that were current in the East of one who would come and bring "life and immor-

tality to light." He remembered that the Magi had said the coming of the Promised One would be accompanied by signs and wonders. A strange star would appear to announce the appointed time to those who awaited the new revelation.

This thought fixed itself in his fancy and he searched the skies with earnest eyes. Away off to the south and east there appeared a star he had never before noticed. Aristos gazed at it for some time then went over to the home of a friend, Aristides, who made the stars his special study. Aristides declared this was a new star and that it might be a token of the Gods and according to prophecy. The answer pleased Aristos, who told his friend the secret of his heart, how he believed this star was the sign of the birth of the One who would remake the world and save it with new knowledge from its unbelief and fears. "Tomorrow," he said quietly, "I shall leave for Jerusalem, 'The City of the Soul'."



II.

THE BIRTH OF THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE FERTILE CRESCENT

For seven days Cyrus and his servants rode through The Fertile Crescent which like a new moon, has one tip at Babylon and the other at Damascus. Cyrus had carefully studied the route before beginning the journey so every day as the sun soared to its meridian he, his servants, and steeds rested beside still waters under the shade of waving palm trees. On the evening of the seventh day Cyrus rode exultingly through the eastern gate of the home city of Benjamin. He found a good inn located on the famous street called "Straight." Before retiring he offered a prayer of gratitude for a safe journey thus far, and taking one long and loving look at the star, he lay himself down to dream of his quest.

A CARAVAN TO JERUSALEM

As Cyrus and his servants journeyed from Damascus to Jerusalem they overtook a party of merchantmen travelling in a crowded caravan. Mounted upon one of the camels sat Benjamin, his face radiant like the new born star itself. As all were now moving along the steep slopes of the hills that rise from the Jericho road up to Jerusalem none could travel very fast, hence all were thrown together in a friendly group.

Benjamin thought he saw in the face of Cyrus evidence of a spiritual joy similar to that which surged in his own heart. He inquired therefore, "Dost thou also seek the Promised Child?" Cyrus answered, "I do," and added, "We shall meet again."

O'ER SEA AND LAND

When one of the Greek trading vessels set its sails in the Piraeus, the port of Athens, for the blue sparkling waters beyond, it carried the distinguished Aristos. Driven by favorable winds and slave-oarsmen the ship soon reached the port of Ephesus. The first man to step aboard was Samuel, the merchant, whose eager, happy look bespoke a great joy of the soul. Aristos watched this interesting fellow passenger, and after some time he spoke to him in the Greek language, which was the common commercial tongue of that day. "Seeketh thou Him who will give to the world newer, larger ideas, indeed, a better system of life?" Samuel answered, "I seek the Son of the House of David who shall reign in righteousness, and who shall judge the nations with justice."

These men, impelled by the same quest, enjoyed fine fellowship as their voyage continued to the great port of Joppa where they were taken ashore in small boats, being just in time to catch a Roman litter bound for Jerusalem. At the very moment when they arrived at the Damascus gate, Cyrus and Benjamin were passing through.

THE BIRTHPLACE OF A KING

Ten days had passed since these four men first saw the star. Now, after their quick visit to Jerusalem, they were all converging on Bethlehem where the Prince of Peace was born. Cyrus asked Benjamin to ride on one of his steeds, while Aristos and Samuel, unknown to the

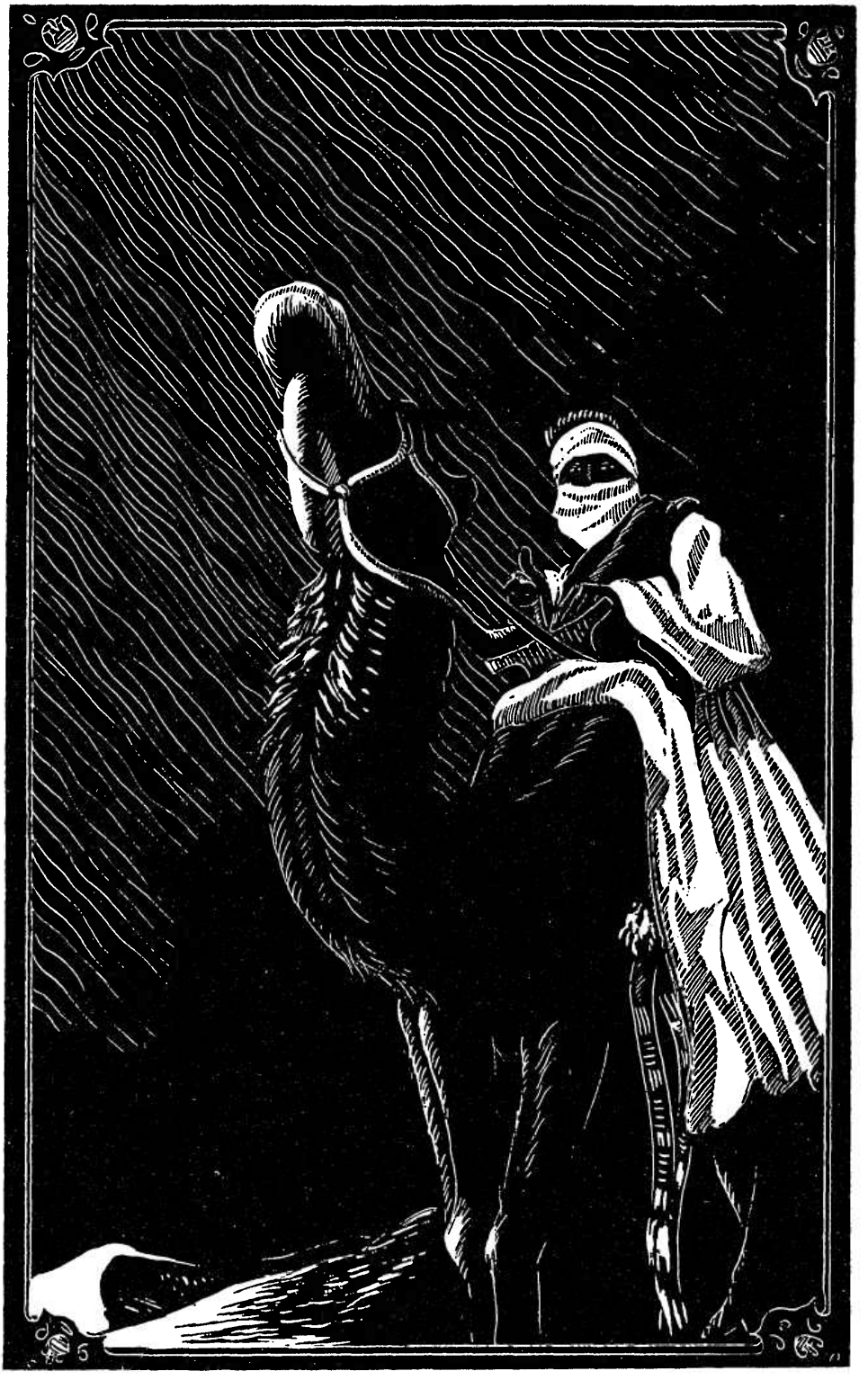
III.

THE SPREAD OF THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

WAR AND PEACE

Illumed by the inner light kindled by their phophetic and successful journey, these four friends agreed to band themselves together and to spread the spirit of the first Christmas day and its divine revelation. After some discussion they made their plans, and started toward the northeast, each man mounted on one of the finest Arabian steeds. Three days' journey brought them near to the city of Damascus. It was eventide and the sun was sinking in a bed of crimson clouds edged with gold. The brilliant colors of the sky were reflected on the great white wall of the city giving them a warm, inviting glow. Recognizing Benjamin, the keeper of the southern gate, called "The Gate of God," permitted them to enter within the romantic walls of the oldest city in the world with a continuous history.

As they proceeded to the quarters of the artisan they met a great, rioting mob of men. Benjamin saw that some of these men were his comrades and began to question them. They told him that they were being poorly paid and sorely oppressed. He said he would do what he could for them, asking some of them to go with him and his three friends to discuss their troubles with their employers. During the conference an agreement was reached by which some wrongs and misunderstandings on both sides righted.



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The employers and the men were so appreciative of Benjamin's services that they arranged a banquet for him and his companions. Many speeches of gratitude were made and a purse of gold was offered to Benjamin, who refused it, saying, "I am glad to hear your kind words because of the harmony we have helped to restore. My aim is to help all men live in goodwill. I desire to see them love and serve one another. But, comrades, I must refuse your gold for myself, however, if you wish, I shall place it with the exchangers and you all can add to it on every Christmas Day what you can afford, and use it as a fund for those who have misfortunes." But they all insisted that he should take the gold and use it in his good works of bringing men into harmony and unity. This he agreed to do. When the four friends saw peace ruling and the men all at work and happy, Cyrus suggested that they proceed to his home city, ancient Babylon.

PRINCE AND PEOPLE, A NEW KINGDOM

For several days they rode across the great desert that stretches between Damascus and Babylonia planning their journey so as to arrive at some palmy oasis every evening at sundown. They frequently met picturesque caravans in which were many interesting sons of the desert. Finally, the great eighty foot walls of the once mighty Babylon appeared in view. Upon entering the city, the first thing that the Prince heard was that some men had stirred up a rebellion while he was absent and that many had been killed and much property destroyed.

Cyrus asked these men to meet him and see what injustices needed to be wiped out. They told him many things he did not know about his own princedom, of graft and oppression, of incompetence, of class snobbishness and hatred. He at once set himself to the task of

knowing his people better and ruling with a spirit of liberty and love. He asked men of all classes to assist him in many necessary reforms. He swore that everyone should have equal rights and that justice should be his motto.

Cyrus strove to increase the health, intelligence, prosperity, and happiness of the people. Every individual was free to develop his talents in industry and commerce, and in the arts and sciences. He was secure in his right to enjoy the reward of his own labor and creative power. It soon became known near and far that this kingdom was the best governed of all on the earth.

The people wished to shower many costly gifts upon Cyrus, but he refused, saying, "My joy is to do these things. I have seen a new light." And then he added, "Our aim," meaning himself and his three friends, "is to see a kingdom owned by all and receiving the loyalty and best services of all." Order being restored, harmony established, and unity of spirit at work in the realm, the other three men accepted the invitation of Samuel to go to Ephesus.

"TO DO JUSTLY AND TO LOVE MERCY"

When the group came to Ephesus, Samuel found much to do in his factories and stores. First of all, he decided not to employ any young children. The women were to receive better wages and those who were soon to become mothers or had just become mothers were given leave of absence with full pay. He improved the conditions in a number of ways, obtaining physicians and teachers who instructed the men and their families in better habits of life. In many instances wages were raised. He built an attractive hall where the men met and discussed their problems and enjoyed a common social life

It soon became known that Samuel had the happiest and most efficient workmen in all Asia Minor. He was thereby made very happy himself. One strange thing about it all was that the more Samuel did for the people the more interest they had in their work and the more good will for society. He paid higher wages but his profits were increased. A part of these increased profits he shared with his men. The public had a kindly feeling toward him and his goods were in greater demand.

But one day a certain manufacturer berated Samuel for doing these things. Samuel explained his aims to him and consequently he, too, began to get a broader and better vision. Samuel said, "Have you ever read these words from one of our Prophets? 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' "

IDEAS AND IDEALS

Having arranged their matters in Ephesus the four men sailed to the home of Aristos, Athens, the intellectual center of the world. Aristos went to the Agora where he daily preached the message of a new spirit among men and a new kingdom of good will on earth. There were many students in the various schools and in the University of Athens from many different lands who listened to his impassioned messages, which some accepted, and followed him.

The influence of Aristos as a preacher could not be estimated for he inspired many keen and earnest young men who devoted their lives to preaching the Kingdom of God, which is righteousness, justice, and service among all men, and to establishing that kingdom in practical ways. They founded schools where the children of the poor were taught the various sciences of the day. Some

of these young men studied the problems of health and built sanitaria in which they made experiments, in order to discover and prevent the causes of disease. Others of these young men even allowed themselves to be experimented upon in order to increase human knowledge and power in dealing with these great problems of the vitalizing, prolonging, and enriching of life. They often sacrificed themselves but they saved the lives of many men. To the Greek ideal of the natural development of the natural man in the natural world, that is, the complete development of body and mind, they added the ideals of love and service, kindness and brotherhood.

Art and literature; science and philosophy; religion and morals were all lifted to a higher plane as a result of the life and teachings of Aristos and his followers. To the abstract idea they added practical idealism.

IV.

THE GENEROSITY OF THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

GIFTS FROM THE NATION

For many years there stood in the Capital of Cyrus' kingdom a magnificant Congress Hall erected by the people in admiration of the spirit of their prince. To this hall the representatives of the people came and made laws founded in freedom to enrich the life of the nation. The Spirit of Christmas, of Good Will, was in the land and everyone was happy.

This Hall stood and was a center of constructive influences for centuries until wild men in great hordes who knew not the value of civilization, swept down from the mountains to the northeast, overrunning the land and destroying its culture. Even then, some power remained and began to mould the lives of these new peoples into better forms. Thus did the Spirit of Christmas prevail.

GIFTS FROM THE MASSES

In Damascus the friends of Benjamin built a great community house where the common people met and where a fine spirit of comradeship was always present. It was the spirit that Benjamin had brought to the people from his Christmas visit to the infant Jesus. No one can

ever tell what that influence meant to the city of Damascus in health, happiness, achievement, and wealth.

The masses were thinking and working for the creation and maintenance of a better social order. In addition to Benjamin, they had some sincere leaders who guided them along constructive lines. Higher wages were being received and hours of labor were reduced so that the men and their families had more opportunity for recreation and culture. This opportunity developed more desires and demands for the goods of life.

One evening Benjamin surrounded by some of the workers and employers in the club rooms addressed a large gathering of people saying: "The real philosophy of life and history is that confidence and co-operation are the creative principles of society, not suspicion and strife. Love creates life and joy; hate kills them. Unity and happiness come into the social order through service inspired by love. After all, the person who does the most useful things, and creates the most beauty and harmony among men, is the greatest man among us. Let us love one another that we may be one in our efforts for a society in which the constructive forces of beauty, peace, and self expression may find fruition. And so can we make a great contribution to the happiness of men."

GIFTS FROM THE CITY

In Ephesus the social work begun by Samuel was followed by other manufacturers and merchants who began to realize their human materials were the most valuable of all, for it is human genius that has the creating, transforming power which makes the raw materials into the desired products. The status of all grades of society was lifted up, wealth was more abundant, and its distribution more just. Parks, playground, and theatres were

given to the city to be used by all the people. A large new stadium was built by the city and dedicated to the social and spiritual uses of the citizens.

Samuel and his fellow employers discovered a great fact from the new spirit of co-operation, of give and take, namely, that the higher wages and increased leisure given to the people did create finer desires; for implanted in human nature is an intense longing for creativeness and beauty, for a joyful fullness of life which is always awaiting the opportunity to express itself. These finer desires mean greater demands for more and better goods, as the demands of recreation and culture are always more expensive than those of the necessities of life. Hence these demands for the better things resulted in increased sales, which in turn caused increased production, which in turn yielded higher profits that made possible higher wages. And so the creative cycle continued for fuller and finer life.

One evening, while entertaining some of the leading men of industry at dinner, Samuel said: "I have seen a new light. I believe that higher profits and wages come not from smothering or even limiting the desires of the people thus decreasing their ability to obtain luxuries, but from multiplying their desires and helping to furnish them the earned income with which to satisfy their enlarged and enriched desires. Probably we can all work together on the idea of having a little more equalization in salaries and wages. Possibly more public enterprises of a constructive nature can be undertaken. By doing these things more people could buy more goods. At any rate let us produce more of the fruits of bountiful Mother Earth, make more things of usefulness, and create more objects of beauty in our factories: and then see to it that all these benefits are made more easily obtainable by the people. If we do these things we shall have nothing to

fear from the people. If we could only have the vision and courage to work out such a plan we all can contribute infinitely more to our common life."

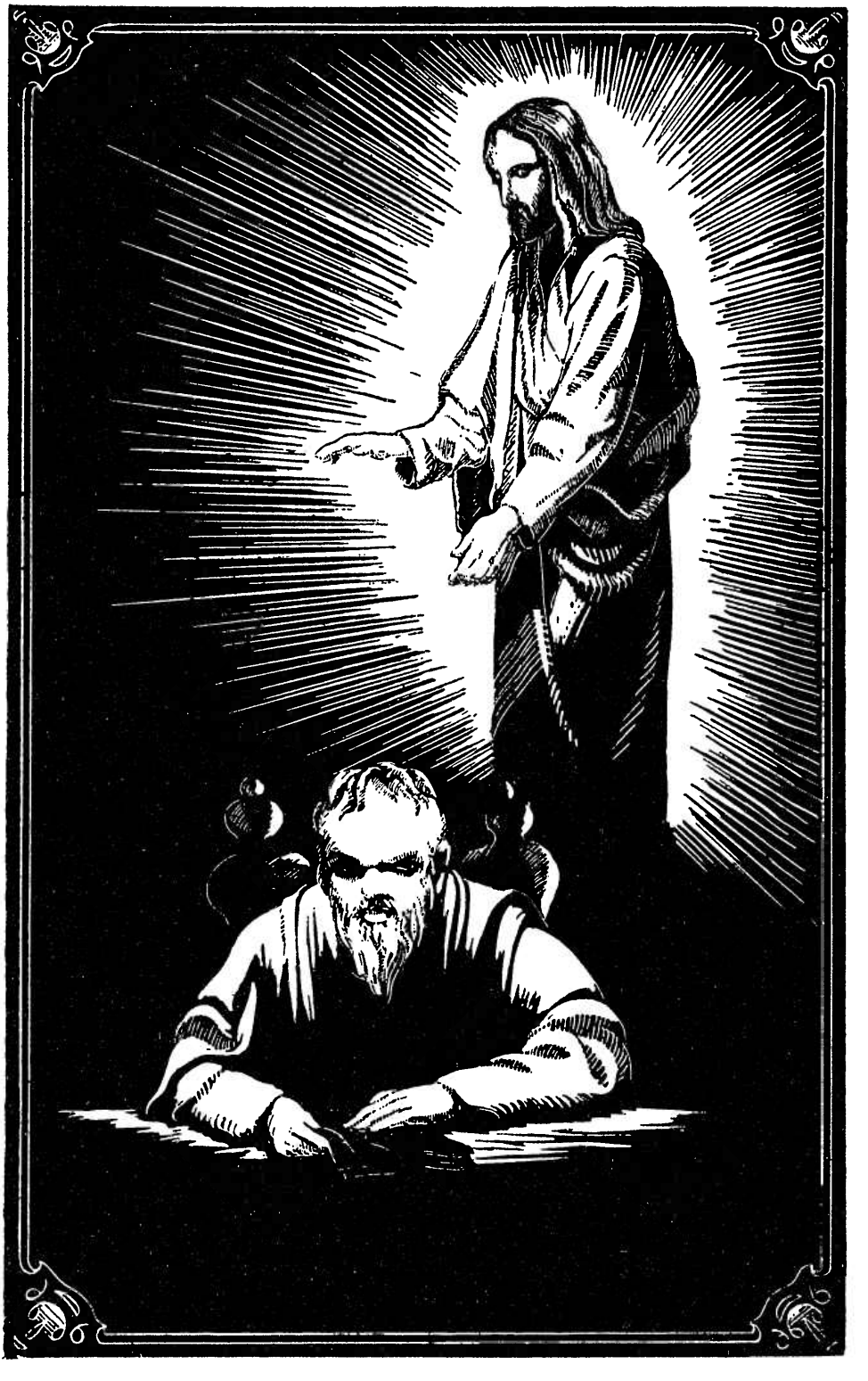
UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

Athens had been famed for centuries because of its wonderful buildings such as the Parthenon and the Theseum. The Temple built by Aristos and his friends, near to the Agora, added new lustre to this city of splendor and became one of the rare gems in Athens' brilliant crown that sparkled from her brow, The Acropolis and its environs.

Aristos preached his gospel in the Temple which was continually filled, for the Athenians being intellectual, were interested in all new ideas. Young men felt their minds being remoulded and their spirits reborn as they listened to the teaching of this man who had found in his Christmas visit to the Promised Child a finer and larger interpretation of the ideas of The True and The Good as taught by Socrates; of the ideal of The Beautiful as presented by Plato; and of the Golden Mean of conduct as set forth by Aristotle.

One delightful evening in the springtime while the gentle zephyrs were playing through the olive trees in the Vale of Daphne, where Aristos and his students were sitting, he advanced this simple but wonderful idea: "Because God is the Father of us all, we all are Brothers and ought to live so as to be known as Brothers." He enlarged this idea of Brotherhood to extend beyond Athens and the Athenians, beyond Greece and the Greeks, yes, beyond any group of men, in order to embrace all men. Thus did he expand the sermons of the old Cynic preachers who had the ideal of the commonality and unity of humanity. This teaching of the Universal Brotherhood

of Man fired the fresh and unprejudiced minds of certain youths to such an extent that they went in all directions to preach it. Their theme was really always the one of the shepherds heard on the first Christmas eve; "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will among men."



V.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE PEACE

Years passed and there was a great gathering in the home city of Cyrus who had now grown old and wished to pass the government on to his oldest son. This son had been trained from childhood to love the people and be one with them, and to rule with equity and justice as a Prince of Peace. The Congress Hall was thronged and Cyrus sat upon his throne. He knew this would be his last appearance to his people, but he was cheerful. He said, "My beloved friends and fellow countrymen, the time is slowly but surely coming when the Spirit of Christmas will reign in our countries and lead all men towards peace, brotherhood, and service. Some day, it may be far away, men will look backward with shame upon our horrible national hates and our cruel, murderous wars, and forward with pride to the coming of the Universal Man. The poets and prophets are right, though they be scoffed at by men of the sword. There will come a day when the war drum throbs no more and the battle flags are furl'd. The futility of hatred and war will ultimately become apparent to the best minds of our race. Men will never rise above a mere animal plane by resorting to the law of the jungle. They will attain the highlands of life only by practicing the law of the Prince of Peace.

"In the ages to come men will begin to feel the urge for larger ethnical units; for great majorities rather than small minorities; for an order in which both majorities and minorities properly safeguarded will be blended into a new and happier society. They will think in terms of an ever enlarging racial culture in which all may have a share instead of in terms of ever conflicting and contracting nationalistic cultures. Thus there will gradually be created a more magnificent conception of human relationships and a more natural grouping of peoples. The combining groups will realize a more abounding life as a result of being equal and contributing members of a greater social unit rather than artificial and shriveled parts of politically isolated nations with conscribed cultures."

A mighty shout of joy from many kindreds and tribes united by Cyrus filled the Hall when these words were spoken. The efforts of the occasion were too much for the Prince who fell forward and was caught in the arms of his son. He smiled serenely and moved his lips gently. His son bent over him and listened. He thought he heard these words, "The Star of Bethlehem! The Star of Bethlehem! O Ormuzd! I thank thee that I found the Promised Child and that my realm has known the Christmas Spirit." His son continued to listen but his father's lips were sealed in eternal silence.

Babylon never before saw such a tribute of love as was the funeral of this Prince who tried to make the spirit of Christmas prevail in his realm.

A GALA DAY IN EPHESUS

On one of the gala days in Ephesus a most unique group of people gathered in the great park which had been presented to the city by Samuel. This gathering was composed of Samuel and all the men who now worked with him and their families.

Here was a real picnic in which the merchant and his friends joined. Benjamin, who had labored with him for some years in looking after the personal interest of the men, was directing the picnic to a certain extent, though, to be frank, the people all knew one another and felt so free that they found their own enjoyment. This park was filled with amusements for persons of every age. In the midst of it was a large basilica or hall in which addresses could be delivered and music and dancing enjoyed. One could travel to the bounds of the earth and not find a happier group of people than these Ephesians.

As the afternoon was wearing away into evening and the purple haze was settling about the distant mountains, Benjamin and Samuel watched the families reuniting to leave for their prosperous and happy homes. Samuel was overjoyed and said, "Our visit to Bethlehem on that Christmas Eve long ago has been the greatest inspiration of our life. The happiness of this day is the fruit of the Christmas Spirit. How much more valuable is humanity than materials; and persons than property! O, that the world could get our vision! I believe it would solve our problems, bring us peace, exalt, enrich, and unify all classes of men." The joyful expression of Benjamin's face was evidence that he agreed with Samuel. He simply nodded and said, "The call of the Christmas Spirit is for all peoples. The man of Nazareth, being one of our common humanity, holds in his gospel the elements of a common salvation."

A TRIBUTE OF LOVE

As Benjamin grew old a soft light kindled in his eyes and brightened his kindly face. He had given many years in service for the people; helping to bear their burdens and rejoicing with them in their pleasures which had increased as a result of the vision and labor of Samuel and himself.

One evening he asked to be taken to his house top that he might look westward towards Athens, Alexandria, and Rome, the seats of learning and power. He gazed intently for awhile as the sun retired into his chamber with its walls of glowing crimson and purple and its softly moving draperies of clouds, old rose and gold. Presently the stars appeared one by one like gems drawn from a royal jewel case and sparkled richly in the sky. Benjamin smiled peacefully and said, "I go to join Cyrus * * * carry on my task * * * work in love * * * for unity." And thus speaking he closed his eyes and passed on amidst the mystery and grandeur of a perfect Mediterranean night.

Ephesus had never witnessed such a funeral as Benjamin's for simplicity and sincerity. He was as well known as a prince and more beloved than any other man.

His body lay for a day and a night in a plain casket in the stadium so that all those who had known his love could have a last look at their friend.

On the second day after his death Ephesus paid its last respects to its great benefactor. Thousands of persons gathered around the stadium. Benjamin's body was placed on a carriage and drawn slowly by a group of men through the streets to the main park. A multitude of all classes and conditions of men formed the procession, some suffering silently, while others, including many women and children, wept and wailed in oriental fashion, for their hearts were broken.

In a large field at the side of the Park that was used for games the crowds gathered in a huge circle around a raised platform on which sat many men prominent in Ephesus. Soon a worker dressed in the garb of his guild recited the good works of Benjamin and how deeply he was loved by everyone.

Then Samuel arose and told the people how Benjamin had inspired him and how he personally loved him for his virtue and kindness which are the essence of real

friendship. Samuel concluded: "A plot of ground has been set aside here on the edge of this playground for the final resting place of our friend, so he may be your constant companion, so to speak, in your recreation and happiness. A simple column will be raised over his grave bearing this inscription:

> Benjamin, the Friend of the People.
> 'Greater love hath no man than this that a man give his life for his friends.'

CHRISTMAS IN THE HOLY LAND

As the Christmas tide drew near Samuel was overcome by an intense desire to visit the Holy Land and celebrate Christmas day in Bethlehem. He discussed plans with his two sons, explaining to them that he wanted to go to the Holy Land and live again, in so far as possible, the experiences of the first Christmas when he had met Cyrus, Benjamin, and Aristos and had been inspired by the spirit of a divine ideal for humanity.

On Christmas Eve Samuel and his sons rode into the quiet little town of Bethlehem just as the shades of evening were shrouding the countryside with mystic forms. They ate a frugal meal at the inn and then stepped outside to enjoy the starry majesty of the silent night.

"Sons," said Samuel, "you can hardly realize what memories flood my mind. Years have come and gone since I was here. What marvelous years! What changes! My friends and I were young then and we went forth from this sacred place longing to live a finer life and to help others do the same.

"Cyrus ruled with justice and splendour leaving a united and happy people living in harmony and prosperity among themselves and in peace with all the world. His

kingdom stands as a national tribute to his noble spirit.

"Benjamin's labors were of the highest service to all those who work. He created good will in our social order and set a noble example for all who are connected with our industrial world. His spirit is a living monument inspiring to employer and employee alike.

"Aristos is daily becoming more famous in Athens, that wonderful center of art, science, literature, and philosophy. There, all who partake of the Christmas spirit are feeling the influence of his mind. How illimitable and amazing are the regions of the mind"!

Upon returning to the inn Samuel said to his older son:

"Please write this letter to Aristos for me.

'Greetings to Aristos from Bethlehem by Samuel:

'Again I am in Bethlehem and thinking of our friends and of our mission to live as far as possible in the spirit of Christmas. Cyrus and Benjamin have won the highest rewards and have passed on. Your name will be immortal. I honor you for your achievements in thought and your leadership of young men. I wish you unbounded joy at this Christmas season. Let us trust that the spirit of good will and peace will some day rule the hearts of all men, for it is their best hope. Fare thee well, Aristos.'

"Thank you Son."

When the letter was finished Samuel handed each of his sons a parchment; one was his last will and testament leaving his business to his sons with instructions to be fair and generous to their loyal employees; the other was a request that he should be buried in a new tomb hewn in the rock of the Holy Land, the home of his fathers and the birthplace of the Christmas Spirit, the loftiest ideal for mankind.

Aristos had built an Academy adjacent to his Temple in which he trained young men for teaching the world the new message of enlarged and enriched life. His work in this respect could not be estimated in external ways for it was inner, pervasive, spiritual. Being a leader of thought his name spread farther than those of his friends. His followers revered him. Perhaps his advanced age and venerable appearance added to the reverence which everyone had for his learning, charming manners, and noble character.

Aristos was now in his eighty-fifth year and while his eye was still bright and his mind clear, his body was worn. He often expressed the belief that he would soon pass quietly to join his friends, Cyrus, Benjamin, and Samuel, who had finished their labors, but whose work was still going on.

In the cool of an evening early in the spring of the year 25 A.D., Aristos and a few of his students walked by the stream Ilisus, where Aristotle had been wont to stroll and converse with chosen followers. Musingly, he said to them, "I feel that I may not be able to renew my strength with the returning spring, the new cycle of life. But I am grateful for a long life of thought, and I rejoice in you, my young disciples, for your life will be renewed with greater promise, and you will carry on our work with greater success."

Aristos slept well that night and arose cheerfully the next morning. After a simple breakfast of fruits, bread, and Hymettus honey, he spent his usual hour in contemplation. With a heart full of joy he went over to the Academy and instructed his older students. He seemed to speak with more fervor than usual. This flow of mental energy was the last rush of the once mighty waters of his

soul: it was, alas, the final, masterful ebbing of a great intellectual tide that had moved with power throughout his long life.

Aristos returned to his study elated but tired. He sat at his table and began to muse of the land of Judea and his visit there years ago. He turned to the south and beheld in a vision, as it were, the Promised Child grown to manhood, and saw a pure white dove descending and alighting upon his head bearing the approval of God. He heard an inner voice saying:

"This is the Son of Righteousness,
The Prince of Peace,
Your Elder Brother,
Your Constant Comrade,
Think of Him."

Then Aristos looked again and saw this man talking to great multitudes who heard him gladly. The vision slowly faded and Aristos' eyes began to grow dim. He turned to his table and took his pen. He wrote a few words, and then folding his arms on the table he placed his head upon them as he had been wont to do for years when engaged in thought or reveries. A deep silence settled in the room. A gentle spirit of love and good will seemed to be hovering above him.

This was the day that Aristos, his students and friends were to meet in the Temple to rejoice at the return of spring and to give thanks for the spread of their gospel and the great increase of their followers.

One of his friends, a teacher, who lived with him and who watched over him, went to his study door. Seeing him in his usual posture, he called; "Father Aristos, the hour is almost come for our great service of joy." There was no movement, no reply. The friend drew near to the table with trembling. He placed his right hand tenderly on the shoulder of the old seer, and as he did so he no-

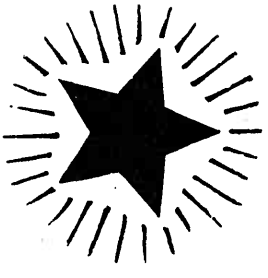
ticed a rare piece of parchment upon which Aristos had just written. He knew that his master had obtained his long desired wish and had been released from this world and had moved on into the realms of greater light with a joyful vision in his mind. He read the last words written by his beloved master: "I see the Promised Child grown into a man, full of love and compassion, high and lifted up, and I hear His words of Good-Will gently winging their way as Doves of Peace unto the uttermost parts of the world. He is hovering over me and giving me his benediction. I am about to join my three friends.

'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people:
A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.'

'I pray * * * that they all may be one * * * * that they may be made perfect in one * * * * * that the world may know. * * * * * *

'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will among men.'"



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